

**COMPLETE LISTING OF CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Claim 1 (currently amended) A batch method for producing a high flash point pitch, comprising:

maintaining the temperature of a batch of soft coal tar pitch at a substantially steady level, and introducing a sparging gas while maintaining the temperature of the batch at a substantially steady level with a temperature variance of no greater than about 10°C.

Claim 2 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the soft pitch is produced by:

- (1) providing a batch of coal tar; and
- (2) heating the batch of coal tar until the batch of coal tar becomes a soft pitch.

Claim 3 (original) The method of claim 2, wherein:

in step (2), the batch of coal tar is heated until it obtains a softening point of between about 40°C to about 80°C.

Claim 4 (original) The method of claim 3, wherein:

in step (2), the batch of coal tar is heated until it obtains a softening point of between about 70°C to about 75°C.

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Claim 5 (original) The method of claim 2, wherein:

in step (2), the batch of coal tar is heated until it obtains a temperature of about 260° to about 270°C.

Claim 6 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the batch is maintained at a temperature of between about 255°C and about 275°C.

Claim 7 (canceled)

Claim 8 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the sparging gas is steam.

Claim 9 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the sparging gas is an inert gas.

Claim 10 (original) The method of claim 9, wherein the sparging gas is steam, nitrogen, argon, helium, neon, or mixtures thereof.

Claim 11 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the temperature is maintained at a substantially steady level until the softening point of the batch reaches about 90°C.

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Claim 12 (original) The method of claim 11, wherein the temperature is maintained until the flash point of the batch is higher than about 270°C as measured by the Cleveland Open Cup test.

Claim 13 (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the flash point in the batch increases at a rate faster than the rate the softening point increases.

Claim 14 (original) The method of claim 12, wherein the flash point is from about 270°C to about 300°C.

Claim 15 (previously presented) A method of producing pitch for a carbon or graphite body, comprising:

- (1) providing a batch of coal tar and providing a still;
- (2) charging the batch into the still;
- (3) heating the batch to a temperature to obtain a softening point of between about 70°C to 75°C; and
- (4) maintaining said temperature at a steady level with a temperature variance of no greater than about 10°C while introducing a sparging gas into the batch until the Mettler softening point reaches about 90°C, and the flash point of the batch is at least about 270°C as measured by the Cleveland Open Cup Test.

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Claim 16 (withdrawn) An impregnating or binder pitch for a carbon or graphite body having a softening point of about 84°C to about 96°C and a flash point as measured by the Cleveland Open Cup test of higher than about 270°C.

Claim 17 (withdrawn) The pitch of claim 16, wherein the softening point is about 88°C to about 92°C.

Claim 18 (withdrawn) The pitch of claim 16, wherein the softening point is about 90°C.

Claim 19 (withdrawn) The pitch of claim 16, wherein the flash point is from about 270°C to about 300°C.

Claim 20 (withdrawn) A pitch prepared according to the process of claim 1.

Claim 21 (withdrawn) A pitch prepared according to the process of claim 2.

Claim 22 (withdrawn) A pitch prepared according to the process of claim 6.

Claim 23 (withdrawn) A pitch prepared according to the process of claim 11.

Claim 24 (withdrawn) A pitch prepared according to the process of claim 12.